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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KINSHASA 001320

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SUBJECT: GROWING LOGISTICS PROBLEMS THREATEN VOTER
REGISTRATION CALENDAR

REF: KINS 1317

Classified By: Ambassador Roger Meece. Reason 1.4 (b/d).

1. (C) Summary: Accumulating reports of logistics problems in the ongoing and critically important voter registration process prompted an extraordinary meeting of the CIAT with the Independent Election Commission (CEI) on August 12, and a broader meeting chaired by President Kabila on August 15. While over 4 million voters have been registered to-date in five provinces and Kinshasa, the meetings clearly revealed the extent of current problems. Only 151 of a planned 1,195 registration centers in Katanga, for example, have been opened, with similar figures reported for the Kasais and elsewhere. The CEI President outlined steps being taken to address the problems, and MONUC has stepped up efforts to support equipment distribution. Kabila, the GDRC Vice Presidents, and others all expressed grave concerns, however, of the potential impact of the problems on the overall election calendar, with particular concern about the ability to hold the constitutional referendum in November. The CEI President, EU Ambassador and others cautioned that catastrophe scenarios are premature, and all reaffirmed the critical importance of maintaining the underlying integrity of the election calendar. Another Kabila-chaired assessment meeting is scheduled for next week to assess progress, and the effectiveness of corrective actions. End summary.

Growing Registration Numbers

2. (SBU) The critically important voter registration process in the DRC is continuing, with growing numbers of registered voters. As of August 15, over 4 million voters have been registered. Voter registration has been completed in Kinshasa, and is underway in five provinces. The call from Etienne Tshisekedi's UDPS party to boycott the registration process appears generally to be ineffective, with good turnout reported at all registration centers opened thus far. One registration center in the UDPS stronghold of Mbuji Mayi (Eastern Kasai) was attacked and largely destroyed last week, although fortunately Independent Election Commission (CEI) personnel managed to evacuate the building and rescue all sensitive materials and equipment. Even in the Kasais, however, there is a relatively good showing at open registration centers.

But Significant Problems Have Developed

3. (C) Despite the good news of successful registration operations at operating centers, growing reports of logistics problems have revealed serious problems in many provinces, particularly in rural areas. These reports prompted the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT) to hold an extraordinary meeting with CEI officials on Friday, August 12 to review the status of registration operations. This was followed by a lengthy August 15 meeting chaired by President Kabila involving Vice Presidents Ruberwa, Bemba, and Zohidi Ngoma, National Assembly President Kamitatu, Senate President Mgrs. Marini, the Ministers of Interior and Defense, CEI President Malu Malu, other senior GDRC officials, and CIAT Ambassadors.

4. (C) The status report and figures provided by Malu Malu at the two assessment meetings were indicative of the severity of the logistics problems. For example, while registration operations have been underway in Orientale province since July 25, as of August 15 only 493 of a planned 1,069 registration centers were operating. In populous Katanga province, registration started August 7, but only 180 of a planned 1,195 centers were open by August 15. Western and Eastern Kasai reported 95 of 636 planned centers, and 111 of 826 planned centers operating as of Sunday evening. Bas Congo was in better shape, with all the 515 centers in operation, although a fair number of these only opened in recent days. The CEI has already extended registration operations in Bas Congo and Orientale for a minimum of an additional week beyond the planned August 14 conclusion to compensate for late openings, although further extensions in various provinces threaten the availability of personnel and equipment for the beginning of registration operations in the

three Kivu provinces (North and South Kivu, Maniema), all scheduled to begin August 21, and subsequently Equateur and Bandundu provinces.

15. (C) Delving into the details behind the figures, problems center on deployment of equipment and materials to remote rural areas, a significant number of which lack road access. At the August 15 meeting, Malu Malu reported that most materials have now been sent to the central provincial and territorial administrative centers. The delayed deployment, however, has also created a significant shortage of trained personnel in various centers, as kits are needed for the initial training programs. These problems have been magnified by a number of DRC parliamentarians, many of whom are now in their home areas during a parliamentary break, who have attempted to block back-up deployment of trained registration personnel from other areas, insisting on the hiring of local personnel, in essence to promote local employment.

Grave GDRC Concern -----

16. (C) At the August 15 meeting, Kabila and the other senior GDRC officials expressed grave concerns over the developing registration picture. All of the GDRC Vice Presidents expressed concerns about the potential impact on the overall election calendar, particularly given the obvious need for extended registration periods in a number of areas. VP Ruberwa went further, openly speculating as to whether elections could be held if registration totals could not be brought up to at least 50 percent of the 26 -27 million voters used as a working estimate for election planning purposes. Assembly President Kamitatu also pointed out that there is a growing discrepancy between urban and rural registration. While the logistically easier urban centers are experiencing relatively good registration figures, rural areas are clearly underrepresented in totals to-date, given the relative scarcity of functioning rural registration centers.

17. (C) The comments reflected concerns that CIAT members had expressed in the August 12 meeting. In both sessions, there was considerable debate as to whether the planned November 27 constitutional referendum date could be maintained in view of the registration problems. Several possible scenarios were offered, including the possibility of trying to hold the referendum on the basis of incomplete national registration efforts, or delaying the referendum vote. Some of the GDRC officials wondered if, in fact, general elections can be held on time, while recognizing that failure to do so by June 30, 2006 would carry disastrous consequences.

18. (C) Other concerns were also noted, including ongoing security issues in several areas in eastern DRC (e.g. the Kivus, Ituri District, parts of northern Katanga). As well, the politically-sensitive issue of the large numbers of DRC refugees still in Tanzania, numbering around 150,000, was also discussed. While conditions for immediate repatriation for these refugees is problematic, Malu Malu reported that there are rumors in the refugee camps that if DRC refugees do not return to South Kivu during the upcoming registration period, they will lose their DRC citizenship. Other variations of these rumors are also being circulated, presumably by those seeking for political reasons to push large numbers to repatriate soon. Malu Malu is planning to travel to South Kivu and Kigoma, Tanzania, later this week to support a stepped-up education efforts to convey accurate information.

Moving Forward -----

19. (C) Malu Malu outlined a complex series of measures that the CEI has underway to address the various shortages. For example, former trainers are selectively being used as registration operators where feasible to address critical local problems. Others are being redeployed to address urgent needs. An emergency reserve of ten thousand registration machines is being utilized to address shortfalls in critical areas. Churches and other local groups have been pressed into service to help get registration machines, materials, and people to remote locations. GDRC customs services have been ordered to give priority to clearing rapidly all elections-related incoming equipment and supply shipments. Local transporters have been enlisted to bolster deployment operations from administrative centers to specific sites in key areas, although care needs to be exercised in this area to ensure the security of shipment of sensitive materials, and that the CEI's strained budget is not fatally broken by unbudgeted new commitments. MONUC, not yet authorized by the UNSC to provide full logistics support, has also sought to up its existing support effort including diverting aircraft as feasible to address the most critical distribution needs. Malu Malu methodically addressed in some way every articulated concern, while acknowledging the need

for further work.

10. (C) While acknowledging the severity of the current problems, Malu Malu, UN SRSG Swing, and the EU Ambassador also sought to provide some perspective on the overall situation, underscoring that it is premature to be looking at catastrophe scenarios. Stepped-up immediate MONUC support, hopefully rapid UNSC action to authorize increased MONUC election logistical activities, and the various measures being employed by the CEI are addressing the most serious problems. All in the August 15 meeting firmly agreed that it is imperative to ensure that the Constitutional referendum be held as quickly as possible, ideally on the proposed November 27 target date, but at minimum before the end of the year. CEI staff and foreign experts are quietly examining how far registration programs can be extended, and the impact of various options on the referendum date. Malu Malu acknowledged that already it is clear that the full voter registration lists cannot be fully scrubbed via the central data bank to eliminate all duplicates or other problems prior to the referendum, but this in and of itself is a secondary issue and should not preclude going ahead with the referendum vote.

11. (C) All agreed that any efforts by politicians or others to block deployment of trained registration operators, or indeed any actions to impede registration operations, are unacceptable and must be stopped immediately. The CEI was encouraged with the full backing of all present to proceed to utilize its personnel as it sees fit and report any problems to the relevant party or GDRC leaders and the CIAT. Full utilization of civil society or other resources, including commercial transporters as budget resources permit, was also supported. A meeting is to be held as soon as possible involving the CEI, the Ministers of Interior and Defense, and other senior officials to address specific security issues impeding registration efforts. Roughly two thousand registration machines used in Kinshasa have now had data transferred to other media, with hard drives reinitialized for use elsewhere. Available now for redeployment, there are a sufficient number to be used in North and South Kivu and Maniema to permit registration to start in those provinces on schedule by August 21. A variety of other specific actions were also covered.

12. (C) Malu Malu and the EU Ambassador both asserted that, while there will still be problems, overall registration numbers should look better by the end of this week, reflecting results of the CEI and MONUC corrective efforts already underway and others to be implemented in coming days. Kabila proposed, and all accepted, that a follow-up assessment meeting involving the same group should be held upon return of Malu Malu from his planned South Kivu/Tanzania trip. That meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, August 24. The Presidency is also pushing for a joint CIAT/GDRC public communique to be issued regarding the gist of the meeting. It should be issued, pending concurrence from all CIAT members, Tuesday or Wednesday, August 16 or 17.

Comment: Serious, But Not Fatal Issues, At Least Yet

13. (C) Comment: In some ways, the logistical problems are not surprising. It has long been recognized that the difficulties of organizing registration and general elections in a country the size of Western Europe, but largely lacking all infrastructure, are daunting. In addition, there is in essence no past experience. This is the first time a valid election process has been undertaken in the DRC since independence, and inevitably there is a learning curve, particularly the problems of reaching all parts of the DRC, vast and remote rural areas. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the current problems and the implications for the general election process are sobering.

14. (C) In our view, DPKO/New York contributed to this problem by delaying its formal request to the UNSC for increased MONUC logistics support authority for at least two to three months, for reasons that are not clear to us. Nonetheless, at this point, the UNSC appears to be moving quickly to act on the SYG's recommendations. In Kinshasa, the CEI seems to have a clear-eyed view of the problems and its options, and is working with MONUC and all other parties to address problems as effectively as possible. In the August 12 and 15 senior-level meetings, all participants were very clear as to the critical importance of maintaining the basic integrity of the election calendar - specifically, ensuring a successful constitutional referendum before the December 31 needed extension of the transition period, and the necessity of completing the full election process before June 30, 2006. Nobody expected that this initial DRC election process would be perfect, and it certainly will not be. We believe, however, the seriousness accorded to the process by senior-level officials in the GDRC as well as the CIAT and MONUC augers well that the basic integrity of the process will be maintained.

15. (C) A set of coordination meetings ranging from technical to senior political levels involving donor governments, MONUC, the CEI, and the GDRC is continuing to identify and address problems. A series of specific efforts, bolstered by results of the August 12 and 15 meetings is underway. Hopefully, agreement will be reached soon in the UNSC explicitly giving a green light to expanded MONUC support activities. The latest problems do not represent the biggest problems that have challenged the DRC transition process, only the latest. While substantial, like the others, they can be addressed, and unlike most other problems, they are largely technical in nature rendering them far more susceptible to solutions in Kinshasa,s convoluted political environment. The August 24 assessment meeting will provide another good check on the results of the measures being undertaken to address the problems, and as necessary an opportunity to look at further steps. End comment.

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